F-1 STEM Optional Practical Training (STEM OPT) Application Process

F-1 students with U.S. degrees in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM) may be eligible for a 24 month extension of their post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) work permission described at 8 CFR 214.2 (f). Under 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(ii)(C)(2), a STEM field of study is a field of study “included in the Department of Education’s Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomy within the two-digit series containing engineering, biological sciences, mathematics, and physical sciences, or a related field. In general, related fields will include fields involving research, innovation, or development of new technologies using engineering, mathematics, computer science, or natural sciences (including physical, biological, and agricultural sciences).”

Before making any plans to be employed on STEM OPT, we recommend that the F1 student speak with their International Visitor Advisor about the best time to file. All STEM OPT extension applications must be received by U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) before the current post completion OPT expires.

Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for the 24-month extension, the F-1 student must:

1) Be in valid F-1 OPT status;
2) Have been granted OPT and currently be in a valid period of OPT;
3) Have earned a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree in a STEM field approved by the DHS Designated Program List
4) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer for a paid job directly related to the STEM OPT major field of study
5) Be employed or have a written job offer from an employer who participates in the E-Verify program;
6) Provide completed Form I-983 Training Plan;
7) Have been recommended for STEM OPT by the Designated School Official; and,
8) Submit the Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization and required documents to USCIS before the expiration of current F-1 OPT status.

NOTE: Some F-1 students may be eligible for STEM OPT based on a previous degree. Please consult with your International Visitor Advisor to determine if you may be eligible for this benefit.

How to Apply:

An application for the 24 month STEM OPT extension must be received by the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) before the expiration date of the current authorization period of standard 12 month post-completion OPT.

The Office of International Affairs recommends that F-1 students must apply for the 24 month STEM OPT extension no earlier than 90 days prior to the expiration date of the current Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

Step 1: Prepare & complete application for 24-month STEM OPT recommendation:

The following documents must be submitted to the Office of International Affairs in order to determine eligibility for the 24-month OPT STEM extension.

1) Completed and signed STEM OPT Extension Request Form;
2) Completed and signed Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization;
   - Form I-765 can be downloaded at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website (USCIS) website www.uscis.gov;
   - Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper code of [c][3][C] at Question 16;
• Student must mark the Form I-765 with the proper degree – example “Biomedical Sciences” where indicated. Student must also indicate employer name as listed in E-Verify as well as the E-Verify Client Company Identification Number or a valid E-Verify Client Company Identification Number for the employer with whom the student is seeking the 24-month STEM OPT extension;

3) Completed and signed Form I-983 Training Plan for STEM OPT students
4) Completed and signed Form G-1145 E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance (http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145);
5) Legible copies of all previously issued Forms I-20’s;
6) Legible copy of valid passport biographic data page to include expiration date and renewal page (if applicable);
7) Legible copy of the front and back of the I-94 card or if you do not have an I-94 card, a copy of your F-1 admission stamp in your passport and a print out of your electronic I-94 information, which can be obtained at www.cbp.gov/i94;
8) Legible copy of all U.S. visa stamps (except for Canadian students);
9) Legible copy of all previously issued Employment Authorization Document(s) (EAD) (front & back);
10) Two copies of your diploma and/or transcripts that indicate the level of the degree and the field of study
11) Two passport style photos meeting specifications detailed on U.S. Department of State website (http://www.travel.state.gov/)
   a. On the back of each photo print lightly in pencil:
      i. Last name, First Name
      ii. Date of birth
      iii. A# (if applicable)
      iv. SEVIS ID Number
      v. I-94 Card number
12) Filing fee in the form of a check, money order, or cashier’s check made payable in U.S. dollars to the Department of Homeland Security
13) Signed F-1 STEM OPT Reporting Obligations form

Step 2: Submit Completed STEM OPT Application to Office of International Affairs

1) F-1 student contacts International Visitor Advisor for a scheduled appointment to provide completed F1 STEM OPT Packet by sending an email to utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu Subject Line of email should state: Need appointment for STEM OPT Request.

2) At the time of appointment, F-1 student must provide completed F1 STEM OPT packet.
   o If complete, International Visitor Advisor will process student’s STEM OPT request in SEVIS and student will sign new Form I-20.
   o If the application is not complete, International Visitor Advisor will inform the student of outstanding documentation.

3) International Visitor Advisor will provide original new Form I-20 recommending the STEM OPT to the student; and
4) International Visitor Advisor will submit F1 STEM OPT application and supporting documents to USCIS. If student is residing outside of Houston, student should discuss the submission process with your International Visitor Advisor.

NOTE:

• Office of International Affairs recommends that students apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension no earlier than 90 days prior to the expiration date of their current EAD card.
  1) If a student has properly filed for the STEM OPT extension, the student’s period of STEM OPT extension starts the day after the expiration of the student’s original period of approved OPT provided that the STEM OPT extension was timely filed with USCIS.
  2) An F1 OPT student is permitted to work up to 180 days after the expiration of the current OPT while the extension application is pending with USCIS.

• Students whose OPT has expired but have a request for the 24-month STEM OPT extension pending with USCIS are strongly discouraged from traveling outside the U.S until the extension application is approved and the student receives a new EAD Card. Please discuss the ramifications of traveling abroad while your extension is pending with your International Visitor Advisor.
Step 3: USCIS Processing Time

1) Once USCIS has received the STEM OPT application and supporting documents, it will take a minimum of 90-120 days to adjudicate the application. USCIS will send an I-797 Receipt Notice to the address provided on the I-765 application confirming receipt of STEM OPT application. The I-797 Receipt Notice will contain a unique receipt number/file number and receipt date. Please review carefully the I-797 Receipt Notice to make sure that the name is spelled correctly. If the name is misspelled, contact your International Visitor Advisor immediately. As soon as the receipt notice is received, please provide a copy to your International Visitor Advisor.

2) F-1 Student may use the receipt number/file number on the I-797 Receipt Notice to check the status of the STEM OPT application (https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do);

3) After the STEM OPT application has been approved by USCIS, the EAD will be sent directly to the address listed on the I-765 application; and

4) F-1 Student may begin or continue employment for 180 days if the F1 STEM OPT application is filed on time and is pending with USCIS; however, student must discuss this matter with employer to determine what documentation must be presented to begin or permit continued employment.

Note: If the F-1 student's address changes while the STEM OPT application is pending with USCIS, the F-1 student is required to report any changes of residential address to both the Office of International Affairs & USCIS within 10 calendar days of the change.

- To report a change of residential address to the Office of International Affairs, the F-1 student must complete and submit the Change of Address Form (Change of Address Form) to Office of International Affairs within 10 calendar days of physical move.

- To report a change of residential address to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the F-1 student must submit a change of address on-line at http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange within 10 calendar days of physical move.

If the F-1 student's STEM OPT application is pending with USCIS, he/she must also report residential address change by submitting address change on-line at the USCIS website.

❖ F-1 students should file the change of address as soon as possible. Failure to notify USCIS will result in having the STEM OPT EAD Card mailed to the wrong address. In addition, USCIS will not forward the STEM OPT EAD Card. This will delay the F-1 student's employment start date.

NOTE: Every individual who is a non-U.S. citizen is required by U.S. law (Sec. 256 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (8 USC 13505)) to report a change of U.S. residential address and phone number with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security within 10 calendar days of each move. This means that spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 years who are not U.S. Citizens must each report their change of address to USCIS. Failure to report timely residential address change to the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services is a violation of U.S. Immigration regulations.

Step 4: STEM OPT Granted

1) If granted STEM OPT and issued the EAD Card, F-1 student is required to provide the Office of International Affairs with a legible copy of the EAD (front & back) Card. Failure to comply will be a violation of the status and may disrupt employment.

   o If F-1 student's current location at the time of STEM OPT approval is outside of the Houston area, a legible copy of the original EAD (front & back) card must be scanned and send to utoiahouston@uth.tmc.edu or mailed to the Office of International Affairs at the address listed below:

   The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
   Office of International Affairs
   7000 Fannin Street Suite 130
   Houston, Texas 77030

   o The F-1 student is required to present the original EAD Card to the Office of International Affairs in order to determine employment eligibility and comply with I-9 regulations.